

Message Text

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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA'S SPEECH OF MAY 7

REF: TUNIS 2526

1. SUMMARY. BOURGUIBA'S SPEECH AT PALACE TO NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEPUTIES -- HIS THIRD SUCH LECTURE IN PAST MONTH -- HAD TWO MAIN THEMES: (A) BITTER PERSONAL ATTACK ON RENEGAGE POLITICAL LEADER AHMED MESTIRI, AND " RECOMMENDATION" THAT MESTIRI BE EXPELLED FROM NATIONAL ASSEMBLY; AND (B) EMOTIONAL DEFENSE OF RIGHTS AND ASPIRATIONS OF TUNISIAN WORKERS. BOURGUIBA WARNED OF DANGERS FOR TUNISIA'S POLITICAL FUTURE INHERENT IN TOLERATION OF MESTIRI- STYLE DISSIDENCE. AT SAME TIME HE SOUGHT TO DEFUSE GROWING LABOR UNREST, PERHAPS WITH SOME SUCCESS. HE IGNORED CURRENT UNIVERSITY STUDENT STRIKE (REFTTEL), PERHAPS SEEKING DRIVE WEDGE BETWEEN LABOR AND STUDENTS. END SUMMARY.

2. IN HIS THIRD SPEECH IN MONTH TO NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEPUTIES, BOURGUIBA SAID HE WANTED TO TALK ABOUT SOMETHING OF GREAT IMPORTANCE FOR POLITICAL STABILITY OF COUNTRY, EVEN THOUGH IT ONLY CONCERNED A SINGLE CASE. CASE WAS THAT OF
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AHMED MESTIRI, FORMER MINISTER OF INTERIOR, WHO WAS STILL MEMBER OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY EVEN THOUGH HE HAD BEEN EXPELLED FROM PARTY. BOURGUIBA SAID PRIME MINISTER NOUIRA WOULD SHORTLY INTRODUCE BILL IN ASSEMBLY TO EFFECT THAT ANYONE EXPELLED FROM PARTY WOULD ALSO LOSE ASSEMBLY SEAT. REMAINDER OF FIRST HALF OF SPEECH CONSISTED OF BOURGUIBA' S CASE AGAINST MESTIRI AND FOR THIS LAW. BOURGUIBA ATTACKED MESTIRI PERSONALLY, SAYING HE WAS VIRUS ONLY INTERESTED IN POWER AND NOT IN WELL BEING OF STATE, THAT HE INVOLVED HIMSELF IN VARIOUS INTRIGUES IN ORDER TO GAIN POWER, THAT HE NEVER AGREED WITH ANY DECISIONS, THAT HE DOESN' T RESPECT ANYTHING OR ANYONE, AND -- GOING BACK TO PRE- INDEPENDENCE PERIOD -- THAT MESTIRI EVEN FAVORED KEEPING TUNISIA PART OF FRANCE. BOURGUIBA SAID NATIONAL ASSEMBLY HAS IMPORTANT POWERS AND COUNTRY RUNS GREAT RISK IF " SUBVERSIVE " ELEMENTS SUCH AS MESTIRI ARE ALLOWED TO BE MEMBERS. THUS IN INTEREST OF STABILITY AND TO ENSURE HARMONY BETWEEN EXECUTIVE AND LEGISLATIVE BRANCHES, PERSON WHOM PARTY HAS SEEN FIT TO EXCLUDE SHOULD LOSE SEAT IN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY.

3. BOURGUIBA THEN PLACED HIS CONFLICT WITH MESTIRI IN LARGER CONTEXT, OUTLINING SOME OF HIS FEARS FOR TUNISIAN POLITICAL STABILITY IN FUTURE IN UNUSUALLY SPECIFIC TERMS. HE SAID: " CONFLICTS, AT THE TIME OF DECIDING BETWEEN FUNDAMENTAL OPTIONS, CAN ARISE ONLY IF THERE EXISTS, WITHIN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, ELEMENTS HOSTILE TO THE PARTY OR EXCLUDED FROM IT. THESE OPPOSITION ELEMENTS WILL FORM MINORITY WHICH ATTEMPTS TO RALLY TO ITS RANKS EVER MORE NUMEROUS VOTES. IT WILL USE THE MOST DIVERSIFIED ARGUMENTS FOR THIS PURPOSE PLAYING ON THE CUPIDITY OF SOME, DEVELOPING AMONG OTHERS THIRST FOR POWER, IT WILL INEVITABLY LEAD TO SITUATION ARKED BY DISORDER AND ANARCHY. THERE WILL THEN BE NO OTHER OUTCOME THAN INSTALLATION OF MILITARY REGIME, AS IS CASE IN MANY ARAB COUNTRIES, OR DEVELOPMENT OF OPEN STRUGGLES BETWEEN CLANS AND TRIBES. I WANTED TO GIVE YOU THIS WARNING FOR YOUR MEDITATION."

4. BOURGUIBA CONTRASTED PRIME MINISTER NOUIRA TO MESTIRI, PRAISING NOUIRA AS MAN WHO HAD WORKED HARD AND WELL FOR STATE, AND WAS CONCERNED WITH COUNTRY' S SUCCESS, NOT HIS OWN. ESPECIALLY PRAISED NOUIRA' S RECORD ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
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OF COUNTRY , AND SAID THAT GOVERNMENT PLANNED ADDITIONAL INVESTMENTS TO CONTINUE THIS PROCESS.

5. LAST PART OF SPEECH CONCERNED WITH WORKERS' PROBLEMS. WHILE SAYING THAT STRIKES SHOULD NOT TAKE PLACE WHEN OTHER MEANS OF RESOLVING DISPUTE WERE AVAILABLE (AND THAT RECENT WILDCAT STRIKES WERE FOMENTED BY EUROPEAN AGENTS), BOURGUIBA

ADMITTED THAT MANY WORKERS UNDERPAID, AND THAT GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND COMPANY DIRECTORS DO NOT PAY ENOUGH ATTENTION TO WORKERS' S PROBLEMS NOR TRY HARD ENOUGH TO IMPROVE THE WORKERS' STANDARD OF LIFE. HE CHARGED PARTY TO CONSIDER WORKERS EQUALS OF ANY OTHER CITIZEN AND TREAT THEM WITH DIGNITY AND RESPECT. HE CHARGED COMPANY DIRECTORS TO CONCERN THEMSELVES WITH WELL BEING AND SALARIES OF WORKERS, AND NOT BE CONCERNED ONLY WITH HOW MUCH THEY CAN MAKE (ATTITUDE WHICH HE SAID HAS LED TO GREAT PROBLEMS IN EUROPE .

6 . COMMENT: BOURGUIBA SEEMED IN EXCELLENT FORM, AND BASED ON DELAYED TELEVISION TRANSMISSION OF SPEECH, SEEMS FULLY RECOVERED FROM RECENT MINOR AILMENTS. PARTS OF SPEECH -- NOTABLY THOSE DEALING WITH CONDITION OF LABORERS -- WERE HIGHLY EMOTIONAL. BOURGUIBA AS USUAL PRAISED HIMSELF OFTEN DURING SPEECH, BUT THIS ASPECT WAS LESS MARKED THAT IN TWO PREVIOUS SPEECHES TO NATIONAL ASSEMBLY.

7. THIS WAS BOURGUIBA' S BITTEREST PUBLIC ATTACK ON MESTIRI SINCE HE DRUMMED MESTIRI OUT OF PARTY AFTER MONASTIR CONGRESS. IT COMES AT TIME WHEN MESTIRI IS LYING LOW IN PUBLIC, ALTHOUGH WE HAVE OTHER INDICATIONS THAT MESTIRI WAS LOBBYING WITHIN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY IN OPPOSITION TO SOME OF BOURGUIBA' S PROPOSALS FOR CONSTI
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